

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 234618 TOSEC 270552

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 234618 TOSEC 270552

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

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SUBJECT: BRIEFING MEMO: VISIT OF JOSE LOPEZ PORTILLO,
MEXICAN PRESIDENT-ELECT SEPTEMBER 24-27

FROM INR KIRK, ACTING TO SECRETARY

1. ECHEVERRIA HAS NOT BEEN FOLLOWING THE MEXICAN
TRADITION OF GRADUALLY WITHDRAWING AND ALLOWING HIS
SUCCESSOR TO TAKE CENTER STAGE. RAMPANT SPECULATION
NOTWITHSTANDING, WE BELIEVE THAT ECHEVERRIA WILL, IN FACT,
TURN OVER THE PRESIDENCY TO LOPEZ PORTILLO IN DECEMBER
AND THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT WILL BE HIS OWN MAN.

2. MEXICAN OFFICIALS FREQUENTLY FEEL THAT THEY NOT ONLY
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 234618 TOSEC 270552

MUST ASSERT MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE, IN CONTACTS WITH THE

USG, BUT THAT THEY MUST BE SEEN TO DO SO. HOWEVER, LOPEZ PORTILLO SEEMS TO BE SELF-CONFIDENT ENOUGH NOT TO BE ON THE DEFENSIVE IN THIS RESPECT. HE WANTS US UNDERSTANDING AND HELP, AND HE WILL LIKELY BE FRIENDLY, FRANK, AND FORTHCOMING.

3. AS MEXICO'S INCOMING PRESIDENT, LOPEZ PORTILLO SEES DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AS HIS OVERRIDING PRIORITY:

--AN EXCESSIVE POPULATION GROWTH RATE;

--LAGGING FOOD PRODUCTION;

--DEVELOPMENT OF ENERGY RESOURCES;

--MASSIVE UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT; AND

--THE IMPERATIVE OF CONTROLLING INFLATION YET MAINTAINING A HIGH ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE.

THESE WILL DEMAND HIS ATTENTION, LESSENING MEXICO'S RECENT EMPHASIS ON ASSUMING A THIRD WORLD LEADERSHIP ROLE. ALTHOUGH MEXICO WILL DOUBTLESS CONTINUE ITS INTEREST IN THIRD WORLD ISSUES DURING LOPEZ PORTILLO'S ADMINISTRATION, IT IS NOT EXPECTED THAT HE WILL TAKE ANY NEW MAJOR INITIATIVES IN THIS AREA. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO LOPEZ PORTILLO'S ECONOMIC ADVISOR, THE INCOMING PRESIDENT'S ORDER OF PRIORITIES ARE: FIRST, MEXICAN DOMESTIC PROBLEMS; SECOND, MEXICAN-US RELATIONS; THIRD, WESTERN HEMISPHERE MATTERS; AND, AS A POOR FOURTH, MULTILATERAL RELATIONS.

4. LOPEZ PORTILLO SEEMS ACUTELY AWARE OF THE NEED TO BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE US AND HAS STRESSED THIS TIME AND AGAIN. HE KNOWS ECHEVERRIA'S RHETORIC AND POSTURING HAVE BEEN AN IRRITANT IN US-MEXICAN RELATIONS AND HAVE OFTEN PROVED DETRIMENTAL IN VERY TANGIBLE WAYS-- CUTTING INTO TOURIST TRADE, CONTRIBUTING TO CAPITAL FLIGHT, AND RAISING DOUBTS AMONG FOREIGN INVESTORS. IN A MEETING WITH US ACADEMICS, LOPEZ PORTILLO SAID HE FELT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 234618 TOSEC 270552

THAT TIGHTER BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE US WERE DESIRABLE AND SUGGESTED THE FORMATION OF JOINT STUDY GROUPS TO ANALYZE MUTUAL PROBLEMS IN DEPTH. HE APPARENTLY HOPES THAT THROUGH SUCH STUDIES, SOME TYPE OF PERMANENT JOINT MECHANISMS COULD BE DEVELOPED WHICH WOULD DEAL ON AN INSTITUTIONAL BASIS WITH SUCH MATTERS OF MUTUAL CONCERN AS:

--MEXICAN UNEMPLOYMENT WHICH SPILLS OVER INTO THE US AS
ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION;

--MEXICO'S NEED TO INCREASE ITS EXPORTS TO THE US; AND

--THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF US INVESTMENT IN MEXICO.

5. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT LOPEZ PORTILLO FEELS THAT THE
US CAN BE AN INDISPENSABLE ALLY IN COMBATING MEXICO'S
DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AND THAT HE IS COUNTING ON US GOOD
WILL AND COOPERATION. HE IS A PRAGMATIC MAN, HOWEVER,
AND REALIZES THAT GIVEN MEXICAN SENSITIVITIES ABOUT THE
US, HE CANNOT APPEAR TO BE ASKING FOR FAVORS. THE
EMPHASIS IN ANY BILATERAL DEALINGS MUST BE VERY CLEARLY
ON EQUALS MEETING TO DISCUSS MUTUAL PROBLEMS.

6. LOPEZ PORTILLO ARRIVES IN WASHINGTON FOLLOWING A
VISIT TO CARACAS FOR TALKS WITH VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT
CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AND VISITS TO COSTA RICA AND
GUATEMALA. ALTHOUGH AT THIS WRITING HIS US SCHEDULE IS
STILL FLUID, LOPEZ PORTILLO HAS EXPRESSED AN INTEREST
IN MEETING IF TIME PERMITS WITH US FINANCIAL AND
BUSINESS LEADERS. HABIB

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